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Disclaimer: This report was prepared by the Office of Agricultural Trade Office of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Dubai, UAE for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care has been taken in the preparation of this report, information provided may not be completely accurate either because policies have changed since its preparation or clear and consistent information was not available. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters verify all import requirements with local authorities through their importers, before sales conditions are finalized and goods are shipped. FINAL IMPORT APPROVAL OF ANY PRODUCT IS SUBJECT TO THE RULES AND REGULATIONS AS INTERPRETED BY THE COUNTRY OF IMPORT AT THE TIME OF PRODUCT ENTRY.

SECTION I: FOOD LAWS

GCC-Wide Developments

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that also includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Food Standards: The Gulf Standards Organization (GSO) is comprised of senior standards officials from the six GCC member countries and is responsible for developing food and other standards in the GCC. The GSO food standards committee, which is currently chaired by Qatar, has been actively updating food standards over the past two years. Based on the WTO notifications that have been reviewed thus far, the committee is working to harmonize existing standards with the guidelines of the Codex Alimentarius and other international organizations. However, in some cases, differences still exist between some of the proposed new standards and existing international guidelines.

In theory, each GCC member should notify the WTO of a proposed new standard. However, typically one or two member countries submit the notification. Consequently, interested parties who review these notifications should bear in mind that, while a notification may be submitted by a single GCC member, the proposed standard will likely eventually apply to all GCC member countries. Once a new standard is approved by the GSO food standards committee, each member country should officially adopt the standard, thus making it a domestic standard as well as a GSO standard.

In June 2007, GSO members approved two new standards to replace the existing food shelf life and labeling standards. The new standards bring the GCC into closer compliance with the guidelines of Codex Alimentarius and, for the most part, offer more flexible requirements for importing foods from foreign markets. The UAE has adopted these new standards as domestic standards.

The GSO has created subcommittees to follow-up on other issues related to food.

- 1. Bio-technology subcommittee that is chaired and hosted by the UAE
- 2. Labeling subcommittee that is chaired and hosted by Oman.
- 3. Additives subcommittee that is chaired and hosted by Saudi Arabia

The GSO also, when the need arises, forms working groups to address pecific issues. Currently, a group is working to develop a unified GCC Halal standard. The first part of the standard outlines general Halal requirements and was notified to the WTO by Bahrain. The second part of the standard is currently being developed and is expected to cover issues related to Halal certification.

Customs and Tariffs: In January 2003, the "GCC Unified Customs Law and Single Customs Tariff" (UCL) was released. The UCL established a unified customs tariff of five percent on

nearly all processed food products. Under the UCL, live animals, fresh fruits and vegetables, some seafood, grains, flour, tea, sugar, spices and seeds for planting are exempt from tariffs. It also established a single entry point policy. In other words, a product entering any GCC member market would pay the appropriate duty only at point of entry and would then be permitted duty free transit among GCC member countries. In practice, this policy is employed only with unopened containers transshipped between GCC markets. Partial shipments tend to be subject to the five percent import duty again in the country of destination. However, it is expected that all goods, even partial shipments from opened containers, will eventually receive single-entry treatment once customs procedures are fully unified within the next year or two.

Food Import Procedures: During 2007, the GCC Food Safety Committee developed a "Guide for Food Import Procedures for the GCC Countries." This guide is meant to unify the applied procedures for clearing food consignments as well as unifying the required import certificates for different types of foods. The intent is to help facilitate the movement of food products within the GCC once customs unification is fully implemented. The United States and a number of other countries commented extensively on this proposed set of procedures. Implementation of the requirements has been delayed as GCC members study the comments. GCC officials are currently planning to implement the requirements in early 2009.

UAE Developments

The Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA) is responsible for developing or adopting all standards. A senior official from ESMA represents the UAE at GSO meetings. The UAE, through the GSO, Codex and ISO has developed about 670 food standards. ATO Dubai has a number of these standards on file, a list is provided in Appendix III, a complete listing of standards is available from ESMA.

The UAE General Secretariat of Municipalities (GSM) establishes food safety regulations based on recommendations made by the National Food Safety Committee (NFSC) on food related matters and by the Veterinary Committee (VC) on meat and poultry related matters.

The National Food Safety Committee (NFSC) consists of:

- Two representatives each from the Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah municipalities;
- One representative each from the remaining five municipalities of the UAE;
- One representative each from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economy & Planning, Environment and Water Resources (Agriculture Section) and Health;
- The Secretary General of the GSM;
- One representative from ESMA; and
- One representative from Al Ain University.

The Veterinary Committee (VC) consists of:

- One representative from the veterinary section of the eight municipalities of the UAE;
- One representative from the Animal Wealth Department, Ministry of Environment and Water Resources.

Specialized committees have also been formed in response to global health and food safety concerns. Examples include Avian Influenza, SARS and BSE.

In each of the country's eight municipalities the respective health department is responsible for enforcing food safety standards on locally produced and imported foods through its food

control section. The representatives of the eight food control sections of the eight emirates regularly meet under the umbrella of the GSM to discuss and coordinate issues of mutual interests and share information. However, each operates independently of one another. The municipalities of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah are the major entry points for imported food products, in descending order of trade volume and value. Occasionally, municipalities act independently when issuing regulatory requirements, which can be disruptive to trade if proper prior notice is not provided.

Food products are regularly inspected at the time of importation, at production facilities and at the point-of-sale. Fines are levied and products destroyed for severe violations. Imported and locally produced food products are subject to the same food safety regulations and labeling requirements. At present there are no environmental laws regulating food product packaging.

Most UAE officials work with companies to ensure that food and agricultural imports are not unduly disrupted or delayed at ports of entry. In cases where ATO Dubai has been asked to facilitate the clearance of detained shipments, officials have worked to find a fair resolution of the situation. However, greater transparency in the regulatory system and broader public dissemination of regulatory changes would likely further reduce the number of detained shipments. As a general rule, Abu Dhabi prefers to import food directly rather than have it transshipped from Dubai.

Because of inadequate public notice of regulatory changes and the autonomy of each municipality to set public health requirements, exporters are encouraged to consult closely with importers on product requirements prior to shipment. If time permits, exporters are advised to obtain pre-export label and product clearance.

SECTION II: LABELING REQUIREMENTS

A. General Requirements:

The UAE was the first GCC country to adopt new labeling and shelf-life standards through a Ministerial Decree that was issued April 13, 2008. The standards are in effect, but exporters and importers have until November 1, 2008, to come into full compliance in keeping with GCC rules providing for a six-month phase-in of new standards. UAE officials are currently a "mechanism" that will aid regulators in enforcing the standards.

Gulf Standard GSO 9/2007 is the new GCC labeling standard. While the UAE has accepted English-only labels in the past, bi-lingual labels are now required. Full enforcement of this provision will be effective on November 1, 2008. Arabic stickers and labels should be legible and show, at least, the following information:

- 1. Product description;
- 2. Ingredients;
- 3. Country of origin; and
- 4. Net weight

Some products may be exempt from the Arabic labeling requirement, but officials are still working through the "mechanism" that will provide greater clarity on this point. Exporters should work closely with their importers to ensure that their products will meet the needs of retailers.

Labeling regulations apply to products shipped in bulk and institutional-sized containers. Bulk cartons of fresh fruits and vegetables must contain most label information, but need not

carry production/expiry dates. In general, the contents of standard U.S. labels satisfy most UAE label requirements. However, production dating continues to be a key difference. A food label must contain the following information:

- Product name (name of the food) in a prominent position on the label;
- Ingredients in descending order of proportion;
- Additives using their "E" number (group names are accepted, see appendix B.);
- The origin of all animal fats (should be of Halal origin) 1/;
- The foodstuff and ingredients which are known to cause hypersensitivity shall always be declared:
- Net content in metric units;
- Production and expiry dates 2/;
- Country of origin;
- Manufacturer's/exporter's name and address;
- Special storage and preparation instructions, if any;
- Foods making health claims must be labeled accordingly and require pre-approval by the Ministry of Health;
- Lot identification.

1/ The use of pork fat, as with all pork related products as ingredients, is restricted. Pork products may be sold in designated excluded areas of retail stores and in certain restaurants. Other non-Halal meats (meat and poultry) are permitted import through an exemption issued by the Director, Food Control Section of the municipality. Such products are subject to certain restrictions, i.e., can only be sold to non-Muslims via the designated areas/establishments. Labels for pork and pork containing products must comply with the general labeling requirements and must clearly state that the product contains pork. Food labels may not include pictures of pork, nor may recipes list pork. To avoid confusion with regulatory officials and consumers, exporters may wish to steer clear of names traditionally associated pork on non-pork products such as turkey ham or beef bacon; however, this is not a requirement and such names are permitted.

2/ Production/expiry dates must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. P/E dates printed on stickers are not an acceptable alternative, as well as U.S. bar coding in lieu of P/E dates. Only one set of P/E dates on the label is permitted. P/E dates must be printed in the following fashion, depending upon the shelf-life of the product:

- Day/month/year for products with a shelf-life of three (3) months or less
- Month/year for products with a shelf-life longer than three (3) months

Under the month/year format, the last day of the month is considered the expiry date. Exporters who list the first day of the month following the expiry date have run into issues when trying to clear shipments. The month may be printed in numbers or letters. For example, both 3/08 and March 08 are acceptable formats.

The word "Production" or the letter "P" must precede the production date. The expiry date must be preceded by one of the following statements: "Expiration (date)"; "Fit for..... from the date of production"; "Use by (date);" "Use before (date);" "Sell by (date);" "Valid until (date) from the date of production;" or the letter "E."

Alcoholic beverages and alcohol containing products can be imported but only through authorized importers who run their own retail shops. There are no special labeling requirements for alcoholic beverages beyond what is typically required in the country of origin.

As with food products, labels for pet foods must be printed in Arabic. Arabic/English labels are permitted, as are Arabic stickers in lieu of Arabic labels. The pet food label must contain the statement "Not fit for human consumption." Production/expiry dates are required for pet foods.

The GSO revised and simplified its shelf-life standard. The new/revised GSO 150/2007 (Expiration Periods of Food Products), which will be fully enforced as of November 1, 2008 in the UAE, will provide less restrictive shelf life requirements for food products. Except for the 22 food items falling under section 4.4.1.1 which includes perishable products and baby foods, food exporter will be allowed to ship products with the manufacturer's shelf life.

The following products are exempt from expiration dating - salt, white sugar, dried legumes, dried vegetables, spices and other condiments, tea, rice, fresh fruits and vegetables and vinegar. However, importers tend to prefer to have such products labeled with production and expiry dates, as consumers tend not to be aware of this exemption.

Except for spices and essential herbs, small packages, where the area largest surface area is less than 10 square centimeters, may be exempted from the requirements stipulated.

Most major municipalities offer the following services to facilitate food product imports:

Pre-shipment approval of:

- Food Labels Copies of labels can be sent (fax copies or e-mails are acceptable) directly or through one of the importers to health officials for review at no cost. If approved, a notice will be issued to accompany the product and facilitate inspection at the time of arrival.
- Products Officials will analyze a product to determine compliance with food ingredient standards. Costs involved vary, depending on type of product and ingredients. Laboratory testing is required on first consignments to the UAE.

Occasionally, local health officials will permit the importation of food products with minor labeling infractions. Exemptions are granted on a one-time basis and the sale of such products is usually limited to institutional end users.

B. Requirements Specific to Nutritional Labeling

Labels for specialty foods, such as diet, health and baby foods, must contain detailed information about the product's vitamin and mineral contents, nutritive value per 100 grams and proper use and storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable. There is no RDA labeling requirement. In general, U.S. nutritional labeling is acceptable and may eventually be the basis for local nutritional labeling standards. However, if a food product carries certain health claims such as "maintains sugar of blood pressure for certain number of hours", they must be cleared by one or more of the following bodies.

- 1. The food control section of the importing municipality
- 2. The medical clinic of the municipality
- 3. The federal Ministry of Health.

SECTION III: PACKAGING AND CONTAINER REGULATIONS

There are no special packaging or container size requirements for food products.

GS 839/1999, adopted as UAE Standard #839/2000, addresses "General Requirements for Food Packages – Part I. The standard stresses the need to use suitable materials that protect the integrity of the food, its wholesomeness and characteristics.

SECTION IV: FOOD ADDITIVE REGULATIONS

- 1. UAE Standard 23/2000 (GS 23/1998): Regulates the use of food coloring additives.
- 2. UAE Standard 356/1995 (GS 356/94): Regulates the use of food preservatives.
- 3. UAE Standard 357/1995 (GS 357/94): Regulates the use of antioxidants.
- 4. UAE Standard 381/1995 (GS 381/94): Regulates the use of emulsifiers, stabilizers and thickeners.
- 5. UAE Standard 707/1997 (GS 707/96): Regulates the use flavors.

UAE officials are referring increasingly to the Codex Alimentarius and other internationally recognized bodies to determine permitted food additives, particularly for those additives not listed in relevant Gulf Standards. Rarely is an illegal food additive or ingredient detected in U.S. origin products. Nevertheless, the U.S. exporter is encouraged to work closely with his importer to ensure the product meets UAE food additive requirements. UAE health authorities note with regard to new-to-market products that "The addition of food coloring, preservatives, antioxidants and non-nutritive sweeteners is restricted." The Food Control Section of the respective Municipality should be contacted for further details.

SECTION V: PESTICIDES AND OTHER CONTAMINANTS

UAE Standard 382/95 (GS 382/94) Part I establishes limits of pesticide residues in agricultural and food products, UAE Standard 383/95 (GS 383/94) complements Part I. In the absence of a GCC or UAE standard, the UAE recognizes the Codex Alimentarius standard that governs pesticide and other contaminant residue levels. Chemical contamination is a growing concern of UAE authorities and efforts are underway to update local guidelines and improve testing procedures. Food products meeting U.S. residue standards will most likely meet future UAE standards. It is very rare that U.S. origin products are rejected due to pesticide or other contaminant residue.

The UAE Ministry for Environment and Water is responsible for registering all types of agricultural chemicals that are imported. A permit must be issued to any importer prior to placing orders to buy any type of agricultural chemicals.

SECTION VI: OTHER REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

All imported food products must be accompanied by:

- A health certificate issued by the appropriate government agency in the United States, attesting to the product's fitness for human consumption
- For meat and animal products, a Halal slaughter certificate issued by a UAE-approved U.S. Islamic Center and notarized by the UAE Embassy/Consulate in the exporting country
- Bill of Entry or Airway Bill
- Packing list
- Country of Origin Certificate

The UAE Embassy/Consulate and the Arab American Chamber of Commerce in the United States must notarize Halal slaughter certificates, which must accompany the U.S. export health certificates at the point of entry. The UAE issued a law in December 2006 requesting that foreign slaughter plants and Halal certifiers pay annual fees before exporting or

certifying exports of products to the U.A.E. Currently, only Halal certifiers have been asked to pay the fees.

There are no specific requirements for imported food samples. Samples for food shows and other promotional events are routinely exempt from local labeling and shelf life requirements, yet they have to be accompanied by a health certificate. Product samples must be clearly marked as samples and accompanied by a statement claiming that they are not for sale or commercial use. Meat and poultry samples must be accompanied by a Halal certificate and FSIS export health certificate.

Since 1998 the UAE has levied a commercial invoice legalization fee (equivalent to 1 percent of the consignment value) on all imported products. The fee can be paid at the UAE Embassy/Consulate in the United States or in the UAE upon arrival. Products will not be released from Customs until the fee is paid.

SECTION VII: OTHER SPECIFIC STANDARDS

The UAE adopts several GCC standards that regulate "baby food based on milk, (#254/1995)" and many other related matters such as methods of testing baby foods, methods of determining minerals and vitamins in infant and baby foods as well as determining the levels folic acid and butane. There are no special standards for specialty food products, diet, or health foods.

Inspection officials routinely check for salmonella in poultry products. If salmonella is detected in more than 20 percent of tested samples, the shipment will be rejected.

Imports of alcoholic beverages are strictly controlled. Only a few local companies are licensed to import and sell alcoholic beverages. These products are exempt from local labeling requirements. The import of non-alcoholic beverages is permitted, but these products cannot contain more than 0.05 percent of alcohol by volume.

The UAE Ministry of Environment and Water Resources is responsible for regulating the importation of live animals and plants.

SECTION VIII: COPYRIGHT AND/OR TRADEMARK LAWS

The UAE is tightening trademark and brand name protection rules. Trademark registration is not mandatory but protection may be limited unless officially registered. Trademark infringement problems are rare in the food sector.

Trademark registration is the responsibility of the Trademark Section, Ministry of Economy and Commerce. A foreign company may register a product/brand directly with the Ministry. To speed the process, however, it is recommended that a local law firm be retained.

Since 1996, the UAE no longer permits sole agency agreements for food brand names. In 2006, the UAE cancelled the exclusive agency agreements that were grandfathered from before 1996 for foods considered to basic commodities. The action was taken in an effort to reduce retail food prices. Some pre-1996 agency agreements continue to be recognized for products such as chocolate.

SECTION IX: IMPORT PROCEDURES

The UAE boasts some of the most modern air and seaport facilities in the world. Food shipments are usually offloaded, inspected by health officials and cleared through customs

within few hours of arrival at port. (Dubai ports are the primary entry points for food products.)

Every food shipment is subject to visual inspection upon arrival to ensure compliance with label and shelf life regulations by health inspectors, while ensuring that documents are in order is the responsibility of customs officials. Shipments are subject to random laboratory analysis. Baby foods and edible oils are subject to 100 percent sampling. Other food products are sampled in accordance with the sampling policy manual, which sets out the frequency of sampling based on food type, brand, and country of origin. A consignment undergoing laboratory analysis is stored under a bonded warehouse selected by the importer, within the same emirate of arrival. Laboratory results are generally known within 5-10 days. New-to-market food products are subject to thorough laboratory analyses. Following the initial shipment, new products are subject to random sampling as are other food products on the market. A product will be rejected if found unfit for human consumption or noncompliant with label requirements. In either case, the product would be destroyed by the local municipality or re-exported to the country of origin within 30 days, at the importers discretion. Products not conforming to label requirements may be re-exported to a third country (non-GCC). Fines may be imposed, depending on the severity of the violation.

A product rejection may be appealed to the Health Department having jurisdiction over that port. The municipality will convene a special committee to review the petition and issue a final decision, normally within a week. The committee's decision is final.

In case of a minor label infraction, a shipment may be permitted entry on a one-time basis for limited sale, i.e., to institutional end-users only. A major infraction, such as improper labeling of products containing pork or tampering with P/E dates, is severely punished, particularly those infractions discovered after import. Such products are automatically banned from import, usually for several months, and the brand name and importer is often reported in the press.

APPENDIX I: GOVERNMENT REGULATORY AGENCY CONTACTS

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APPENDIX III: LIST OF FOOD STANDARDS AVAILABLE IN ATO DUBAI

GCC Standards #	Titles
GS 567	Cocoa And Its Products Chocolate
GS 569	Milk And Milk Products- Methods of Sampling
GS 592	Methods of Sampling Meat And Meat Products
GS 593	Meat and Meat Products- Physical Tests
GS 1342	Dried Apricots Shreds (Kamarudin)
GS 1358	Unshelled Pistachio Nuts
GS 1393	Shelled Walnuts
GS 1402	Sweet Shelled Almonds
9/1995	Labelling Of Prepackaged Foodstuffs
10/1984	Dried Milk
11/1984	Non-Alcoholic Carbonated Beverages-Preliminary Examination and Determination of Total Acidity and Sodium Carbonate Contents
12/1984	Non-Alcoholic Carbonated Beverages-Determination of Carbon Dioxide Content
13/1984	Non-Alcoholic Carbonated Beverages-Determination of Sulphur Dioxide Content
14/1984	Non-Alcoholic Carbonated Beverages-Determination of Phosphoric Acid Content
15/1984	Methods of Sampling for Edible Oils and Fats
16/1984	Physical and Chemicals Methods for Testing Edible Vegetable Oils and Fats
17/1984	Methods of Test for Permitted Additives in Edible Oils and Fats - Part 1-
18/1984	Non-Alcoholic Carbonated Beverages (Arabic & English)
19/1984	Permitted Food Additives In Edible Oils & Fats
20/1984	Methods for the Determination of Contaminating Metallic Elements in Foodstuffs
21/1984	Hygienic Regulations for Food Plants and their Personnel
22/1984	Methods of Test for Colouring Matter Used in Foodstuffs
23/1998	Colouring Matters Used In Foodstuffs
59/1998	Powdered Milk (Arabic)
63/1998	Food Colors (Arabic)
150/1992	Expiration Periods of Food Products - Part 1
160/1993	Processed Cheese and Spreadable
244/1994	Methods of Test for Vegetable, Fruits and their Products- Part 1
260/1994	Methods of Test For Fruits, Vegetables and Other Products- Part 3
261/1994	Microbiological Methods of Food Ezaminatio- Part 1: Preparation of Samples
GCC Standards #	Titles
323/1994	General Requirements For Transportation and Storage Of Chilled And Frozen Foods
333/1994	Ghee (SAMN)
336/1994	Cheddar Cheese
356/1994	Preservatives Permitted For Use Food Products
357/1994	Antiotixandants Permitted For Use In Foodstuffs
381/1994	Emulsifiers, Stabilizers And Thickeners Permitted For Use In Food Products
382/1994	Maximum Limits Of Pesticide Residues In Agricultural And Food Products - Part 1
383-1994	Maximum Limits Of Pesticide Residues Permitted In Agricultural And Food Products- Part 2
457/1994	Frozen Foodstuffs (Arabic)

651/1996	Cream (Arabic)
707/1996	Flavouring Permitted For Use In Foodstuffs
789/1997	Dried Apricots
832/1997	Creamy Cheese (Arabic)
839/1999	Food Packages-Part 1: General Requirements
995/1999	Sweetners Permitted For Use In Food Products
997/1997	Beef, Buffalo, Muton, and Goat Meat, Chilled and Frozen
1000/2000	Method of Sampling for Prepackaged Food Products
1016/2000	Microbiological Criteria for Food Stuffs- Part 1
1023/2000	Expiration Periods of Food Products - Part 2
1034/2000	Raisins
1287/2003	Methods Of Sampling Of Prepackaged Fruit And Vegetable Products
1354/2002	Soy Protein Products